Department of Justice Canada | Ministère de la Justice Canada

Canada

Speaking Notes for
THE HONOURABLE ROB NICHOLSON, P.C., Q.C.,
M.P. for Niagara Falls
Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada
for the
Announcement of Tabling of Legislation on Mandatory Prison Sentences for Serious Drug Crimes

Ottawa , Ontario
November 20, 2007

Check against delivery

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

I am pleased to be here with my colleague Minister Day and Secretary of State Paradis. We are announcing another step in our Government's plan toward tackling crime and strengthening the security of Canadians.

Early in October, Prime Minister Harper announced our National Anti-Drug Strategy, because we know that drugs are dangerous and destructive.

Illegal drug use among teens and young people is rising and every year, sadly, illegal drugs are directly implicated in the deaths of many Canadians.

Drugs are infiltrating our neighbourhoods, turning suburban homes into grow-ops and crystal meth labs.

And producers use their drug profits – estimated in the tens of billions of dollars per year in Canada – to finance a wide range of other criminal enterprises.

Studies have shown that drug crime is on the rise and the number of methamphetamine labs is growing. This criminal activity leads to more petty crime, more violence, and more risk to law enforcement officers.

Drug producers and dealers threaten the safety of our communities; they must face tougher penalties. W e want to put organized crime out of business.

When the Prime Minister announced our National Anti-Drug Strategy, he highlighted our intention to help prevent people from becoming enslaved by drugs, and freeing people from drugs when they get hooked. But as part of this strategy, we announced getting tough on drug dealers and producers.

I am proud to announce that just minutes ago, I tabled legislation that proposes mandatory jail time for people involved in serious drug crimes.

For too long Canadian governments have been sending mixed messages about drugs.

As it stands now, there are no mandatory prison sentences for offences under the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*.

With today's bill, we are saying that serious drug crimes will mean serious jail time.

We're proposing that

- drug dealers face a one-year mandatory prison sentence if they're dealing for organized crime purposes, or if a weapon or violence is involved;
- drug dealers face a two-year mandatory jail sentence if they're selling to youth, or dealing drugs near a school or an area normally frequented by youth;
- people in Canada who run a large marijuana grow operation of at least 500 plants face mandatory two-year jail time; and
- penalties for producing cannabis increase from 7 to 14 years.

This should be clear: the bill tabled today is aimed serious drug offenders – not those addicted to drugs who may commit crimes to support their habit.

Our government does understand that many offenders involved in dealing only do so to support their habits, and are not necessarily violent.

I should point out that an offender who has successfully completed the program approved by a drug treatment court and whose offence does not involve any of the aggravating factors such as violence will receive a reduced or suspended sentence.

The facility we are at today, Rideauwood Addiction and Family Centre, has successfully treated offenders that are referred here by the Ottawa Drug Treatment Court. We are pleased to be joined by Executive Director Paul Welsh.

Our Government was elected to build a strong, safer, better Canada. We said we would work to make our streets safer and protect our youth from a life of drugs and crime, and we remain committed to that goal.

For any government, there is no greater duty than the protection of its citizens. Our *Speech from the Throne* set out our commitment to tackling crime and strengthening the security of Canadians. This new legislation is one more step in that direction.

Thank you. Now my colleague Minister Day will say a few words...

- 30 -

Date Modified: **2008-04-14**